

Season of Pentecost Proper 28 – Year B
November 17, 2024
Pastor Jasper Sellnow



Theme: In Jesus we have life
Text: **John 5:24-29**

²⁴“I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life. ²⁵I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. ²⁶For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself. ²⁷And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man.

²⁸“Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice ²⁹and come out—those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.

“Little girl, I say to you, get up!” (Mark 5:41)

“Young man, I say to you, get up!” (Luke 7:14)

“Lazarus, come out!” (John 11:43)

What do these three statements have in common? Well, all of them were spoken by Jesus. And all of them had broken up a funeral. Death did not stand a chance when it faced off with Jesus. Whether it was Jairus’ daughter, the young man at Nain, or his friend Lazarus. Jesus’ voice called the dead to life.

As Jesus said in our sermon text: **I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. (John 5:25)**

But those words spoken by Jesus here in our sermon text were not only for the physically dead people that he brought back to life.

Jesus had previously said: **“Whoever believes in the Son *has* eternal life.” (John 3:36)**

We also heard him in the opening verse of this sermon text say: **“Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me *has* eternal life.” (John 5:24)**

His disciple John would also later write: **“He who *has* the Son has life.” (1 John 5:12)**

Jesus’ voice calls the dead to life. You see, even before we physically die, there is a death that all of us need resurrection from... St. Paul wrote about this in Ephesians chapter 2 where he

described our natural condition as human beings saying: **As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins. (Ephesians 2:1)**

As human beings born from two sinful parents, all of us begin our lives spiritually dead. From the moment of conception we have a desperate need to be forgiven and made right with God. And there is nothing that human flesh and blood – our own, or anyone else’s – can do to fix this problem. So how can spiritually dead people be raised to new life? Jesus gives us the clear answer in John chapter 6: **The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. (John 6:63)**

When Jesus speaks... when people hear his words... God the Holy Spirit works. And it is only through God the Spirit working on our hearts that we believe and live. It is God’s work, not ours, that brings us spiritual life. St. Paul put it this way in Colossians chapter 2: **When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. (Colossian 2:13-14)**

Today, God is reminding us in our service that as you *LIVE LIKE YOU’LL LIVE FOREVER* you can do so living free from the fear of judgment. Christ has paid our debt, cancelled the law code that condemned us, and made us alive spiritually when we were dead in sin and headed for eternal death in hell. Yes, because of Jesus we need not fear judgment... because of Jesus we know we will live! And we won’t just live someday... by faith in Jesus we live today. And though our full enjoyment of it is yet to come, make no mistake, eternal life is ours right now. And that’s because in Jesus we have life – now and forever.

So let’s ask the good Lutheran question: “What does this mean?” What does this mean that we have eternal life now, even here on earth? And what does it mean that we will have life forever in heaven?

Well let’s start with the first resurrection. Listen again to Jesus’ words that open our sermon text: **“I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life. I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live.” (John 5:24-25)**

As we already discussed... these words remind us that there is a new life Jesus gives to people right now, even before the resurrection on the Last Day. As he says, this eternal life comes to **whoever hears my word and believes...** even now, Jesus says, **he has crossed over from death to life.** This means that God does not view you as dead to him in sin. Instead God the Father sees you as alive and sinless in his Son Jesus. Through faith in Jesus you are holy in God’s sight – a saint. You are beloved, just like Jesus, and considered God’s perfect child.

And this is true no matter how you feel, no matter what the world tells you, no matter how Satan tries to accuse you... If God says you have eternal life through faith in Jesus, then you do. And although you live in a sinful body that is still subject to death, your inner being is your new

identity and who you really are in God's eyes. As God tells us in his Word: **If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! (2 Corinthians 5:17)**

Without faith in Jesus we would simply be the walking dead here on earth... we'd be like zombies who have an appearance of life, but in reality are dead. But if God lives in us by faith – then we have a life no one can ever take away. St. Paul reminds us of this in Romans chapter 8: **But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. (Romans 8:10)**

What does all this mean? It means that all who look to Jesus in faith have something the unbelieving world will never have or understand. It means right now you are at peace with God. No matter how you feel God does not hate you. No matter what terrible thing you did yesterday or this morning or two seconds ago, God does not reject you. Because Jesus died on the cross to pay for your sins – and you believe that to be true – God does not hold your sinful thoughts, words, or actions against you. He has forgiven you. And his forgiveness is so total... so complete... that he is willing to live with you... to live *in* you right now! It's as if God is saying... "One day you'll live body and soul with me – alive forever in heaven. But until then I'll come and bring heaven into your heart as I make my dwelling with you."

And this changes our perspective on this life. No longer does sin look so appealing. Though I will still be tempted by it, I will no longer love it, embrace it, live in it, or excuse it. I'll flee from it, fight it, and when I fall into it, I'll confess it freely as I seek the mercy and pardon I know I have in Jesus.

This new perspective also means that no longer does trouble, and heartache, and pain, and suffering seem so overwhelming. Even death itself loses its power to fill us with dread. If we are forgiven and at peace with God... if we have eternal life as our personal possession right now... well, then what on earth could move us? Even if we lose all things in this life, we will still have the only life that really matters. Life with God. Life eternal in his kingdom. As Luther so beautifully put it in his great Reformation hymn, "A Mighty Fortress": *And take they our life, goods, fame, child, and wife – let all these be gone – the victory is won. The kingdom's ours forever!*

And speaking of that eternal kingdom, let's consider that second "What does this mean?" question. What does this mean that we'll have life forever in heaven?

Well, this life will truly begin on the Last Day as God's Word teaches us. Because while it is certainly true as we've seen that we possess eternal life even now by faith in Jesus... and while it's certainly true that when our bodies die our souls go right on living by this same faith in Jesus... remember Jesus' words on that subject: **"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies." (John 11:25)**

While all that is true... it is on the Last Day when the complete fulfillment of God's promise of eternal life will be delivered to his believers. We heard in our first lesson today from Daniel that God will raise the bodies of all who die. This physical resurrection was guaranteed for all ever since Jesus himself walked out of the grave alive on Easter Sunday. You see, if Jesus lives that

means the grave cannot hold us forever. But while it's true that all people will be brought back to life physically... their final destination will not be the same.

We heard in Daniel chapter 12: **Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. (Daniel 12:2)** And why will some rise to eternal life and others to eternal death? Jesus puts it this way in our sermon text: **“Those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.” (John 5:29)** This of course is referring to believers in Jesus and those who did not trust in Jesus as Savior.

Those who do not trust in Christ cannot do anything that is considered good in God's sight. They might do things in this life that seem outwardly good, but if they are not done for God they are actually evil no matter how nice they might seem. This is because by nature the only reason we do good things is for ourselves. We do them because of what we get in return. I help you and you owe me one. I help this person and others notice how good I am. I do the right thing, and God will accept me. But building up a stock of favors people owe us is not the right reason to do good... building up glory and honor for myself and my reputation is not God pleasing... and even doing things with the thought that God will love me more, accept me as his child, or bring me to heaven one day... even this misses the point. God does not accept anyone who is not perfect. Which means the only way we can be accepted by God is through faith in Jesus Christ who was perfect in our place. As God tells us in another place: **Without faith it is impossible to please God. (Hebrews 11:6)**

But through faith in Jesus God does see us as good. In fact this is why Jesus talks about **those who have done good** rising to live. He can point to the good deeds of believers on the Last Day not as payment for their spot in heaven, but as evidence of their faith in the Savior who already earned heaven for them.

And the heaven we will enter into on the Last Day is the final salvation that all Christians truly long for. On that day all Christians who have died in the past will have their bodies raised to new and eternal life. Soul and body will be reunited in a life that will never end. And even those who are still physically living when Jesus comes back to this earth will be changed. Paul explains this in 1 Corinthians 15 – the great resurrection chapter of the Bible: **we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. (1 Corinthians 15:51-52)**

And what will these newly changed or raised bodies be like? The Bible tells us that: **[Jesus] will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body. (Philippians 3:21)** Jesus' glorious, resurrected body is not subject to sin, or pain, or disease, or death. That means we will not face those things ever again either. Just think of it! We will never feel an urge to do something we know is wrong. We will never hurt the people we love with the things we say and do. And we will never again be hurt by them. We will not face abuse or fear. We will not get sick or grow old and weak. We will never have to dread death and grave ever again. Because of Jesus we will live forever.

And this life will be no boring eternal yawn floating on clouds and playing harps like some

imagine it to be. In speaking of eternity in heaven King David spoke in the Psalms of unending joy and pleasure as he said to God: **You will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand. (Psalm 16:11)** Heaven will not get old... the joys and pleasures of heaven will never cease to bring us happiness. In fact, we will be busy ruling over the new creation our God promises he will make on that Last Day. We will continue to have roles to play in this forever existence... serving God in new and joy-filled ways. We will enjoy the company of saints and angels. Singing with the angel choirs. Talking with the people of God from the Bible about how great our Savior is. Rejoicing with family and friends who trusted in Christ and now live together with him forever. Yes, heaven will never get old.

And the old fears and sadnesses of this life will never come back again. The Bible tells us that in heaven we will be: **Before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. (Revelation 7:15-17)**

My friends, when Jesus tells us today that we have life now and forever in him... let that good news bring you the peace he intends and the hope he inspires. Don't be deceived by the life of sin and death that brings sadness all around us. This is temporary. It won't last. But Jesus and his love and the life he gives us – this will last forever. And until forever dawns in the glory of the Last Day, let us continue to listen to the voice of our Savior Jesus... let us listen to his voice and live. Amen.